

2001 – 2002 Campus Consultation Visits

During spring 2002, the council staff visited each university and the KCTCS to review academic program approval practices. The purpose of the review was to determine the extent to which campus policies and procedures were consistent with the streamlined academic program policies put in place by the council in 1999. This report highlights the staff's findings and recommendations.

Why did we do it?

In November 1999, the council delegated to the institutions and their governing boards greater authority for establishing new academic programs. The council outlined a set of principles it expected institutions to follow when developing programs, and it also put standards in place to ensure that existing programs were productive and were contributing to state needs. As a *quid pro quo* for this deregulated approach, the council directed the staff to periodically review each institution's program approval practices to see if they reflected the council's guiding principles for new program development. The council's interest was on the following matters of statewide importance:

- A rigorous process to determine the need for the program.
- Consultations with employer and other relevant groups in program design.
- Collaborative efforts including articulation agreements with similar programs at other postsecondary institutions.
- Sound methods for evaluating student learning and program success.

What did we do?

As a first step, the council staff reviewed program approval policies from Kentucky institutions and other states. Next, the staff selected one or two academic programs per institution that had been established after 1999. The process for developing these particular programs became the focus of the review. In April and May, the staff visited each campus and met with faculty, department chairs, academic deans, faculty senate representatives, university program approval committees, and chief academic officers. Individual campus assessments are being sent to each chief academic officer. Institutions will be asked to report on changes in program approval processes by December 2002. A summary will be provided to the council.

What did we find?

The review revealed that program approval practices across the campuses varied in the amount of attention given to the council's criteria. Some institutions' processes conformed closely to the criteria. Others incorporated some, but not all, of the council's concerns. What follows are the staff's general findings and recommendations.

1. Needs assessment. The recently approved programs that were the focus of the review demonstrated a commitment to connecting new programs to state needs. These programs, like almost all recently approved programs, were applied or professional programs. Consequently, their attention to needs assessment and employer demands was driven, in part, by well defined employer and accreditation requirements. However, written institutional policies in some cases did not include a rigorous needs assessment of student and workforce demand. Institutions should standardize assessments to ensure programs link to economic and community needs. The council staff is developing a standard format for institutional use.
2. External consultation. Some institutional policies do not require consultation with student supplier or consumer groups as a regular part of proposal development. In addition to assessing the need for the program, the process for developing new programs should require consultation about curriculum with groups expected to supply students (high schools and KCTCS) and those offering additional education and employment to graduates.
3. Collaboration. Institutions do require those proposing new programs to assess opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration on the campus. All institutions also require consultation with other institutions as a part of the new program approval process. However, often this requirement only ensures that other institutions do not object to the program. Legally required articulation agreements with similar programs often are overlooked or developed late in the process. Institutions should strengthen requirements for new programs to collaborate with similar programs at other institutions to improve access, efficiency, and quality for both new and existing programs. New program proposals also should be required to develop articulation agreements in the original design of the program.

Recent conversations between the council and the chief academic officers have begun to refocus collaboration conversations. The issues raised at the March 2002 meeting of the chief academic officers with council members will be considered as institutions revise their program approval processes.

4. Student success measures. Institutions are rapidly developing goals and measures of student learning and success in response to regional accreditation requirements. Changes are needed to ensure new programs have these standards in place prior to beginning the program.
5. Program success. Program proposals sometimes do not include criteria defining program success. Institutions should include criteria for assessing program success within a specified time. Council degree productivity standards, level of research production, student placement, or development of partnerships serving the community and economy could be used to create criteria for evaluating programs.

Where do we go from here?

The council staff is working with the institutions to change both campus and council procedures based on the results of this review. A written summary of changes will be provided by December 2002. Institutions were extremely cooperative partners throughout the review process and indicated a willingness to modify their processes to address the issues outlined above. The council staff is revising its Web-based process to clarify council expectations for new program proposals.

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